

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 083 350

UD 013 871

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TITLE Some French Initiatives in Educating the Socially and Culturally Disadvantaged. Recent Educational Policy and Legislative Developments Abroad.
INSTITUTION Institute of International Studies (DHEW/OE), Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO DHEW-OE-73-19101
PUB DATE 73
NOTE 21p.
AVAILABLE FROM Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402 (Stock No. 1780-01177; \$0.30 domestic postpaid; \$0.20 GPO bookstore)
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.65 HC-\$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Culturally Disadvantaged; Demography; Disadvantaged Youth; Economically Disadvantaged; Educational Change; Educational Planning; *Educational Policy; *Educational Programs; Minority Group Children; Program Development; Social Change; *Socially Disadvantaged; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *France

ABSTRACT

This report on some efforts being made in France to improve the education of the socially and culturally disadvantaged is presented for such value as it may have to American educational planners in their search for solution to this difficult problem. For the purposes of this study the term "socially and culturally handicapped or disadvantaged" is understood to include those social or cultural factors that cause a child to enter "the school system with knowledge, skills, and attitudes which impede learning and contribute to a cumulative academic deficit." In France, the vast majority of young people with learning problems are the children of poor farmers, factory workers, North Africans, and migrant workers. Their disadvantage often persists throughout school life and may contribute to restricting later economic and social opportunities. The present study will leave to specialists in political science, economics, and sociology and analysis of the fundamental causes of the very important social dynamics. It will, for its part, concentrate on the pedagogical approaches to the problem of the education of socially and culturally disadvantaged children now being attempted by the French Ministry of National Education. However, the problem, as defined here, obviously requires a solution far broader than a restructuring of educational systems. It raises fundamental questions about a nation's self-image, its goals, its concept of the nature and destiny of man in society, and its responsibility toward its citizens. (Author/JM)

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Recent Educational Policy and Legislative Developments Abroad

SOME FRENCH INITIATIVES IN EDUCATING THE SOCIALLY AND CULTURALLY DISADVANTAGED

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UD 013871

DHEW Publication No. (OE) 73-19101

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON: 1973

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents,
U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402
Price: 30 cents, domestic postpaid; 20 cents, GPO Bookstore
Stock No. 1780-01177

Foreword

The changing social realities and a variety of research efforts during the past decade have brought about a growing recognition in many parts of the world that providing equality of educational opportunity is truly a very difficult undertaking, more so than had formerly been believed. The task has turned out to be far more complex than simply legislating or otherwise providing for compulsory school attendance, financial assistance programs, and either standard or flexible pedagogical requirements, for example.

The problem of achieving equity for disadvantaged students is one about which an increasing number of nations have become seriously concerned. Because of the commonality of many aspects of the problem, it can be helpful to learn more about the experience of others.

Dr. Wanner's review of recent developments in French education with respect to disadvantaged students therefore will be of interest to many. The study provides a useful summary of the French approach to solution or alleviation in that nation's social and educational context. It also serves as another illustration of a critical educational problem or issue which many nations share in common.

Robert Leestma
*Associate Commissioner
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1. The Problem in Perspective

Few educational problems have been so emotionally charged, so politically sensitive, so widely studied, and so frustratingly difficult as the education of socially and culturally disadvantaged children. Indeed, it is probably fair to say that educators have had more demonstrable success in developing effective educational programs for physically and mentally handicapped children than for their brothers and sisters, most often sound of body and mind, who suffer from social and cultural handicaps.

For the purposes of this study the term "socially and culturally handicapped or disadvantaged" is understood to include those social or cultural factors that cause a child to enter "the school system with knowledge, skills, and attitudes which impede learning and contribute to a cumulative academic deficit."¹ In France the vast majority of young people with learning problems are the children of poor farmers, factory workers, North Africans, and migrant workers. Their disadvantage often persists throughout school life and may contribute to restricting later economic and social opportunities.²

In order to place this serious problem in its proper perspective, it may be helpful to be reminded that organized efforts to educate socially and culturally disadvantaged children are not exclusively a phenomenon of contemporary American society. Such efforts date from antiquity. Vittorino da Feltre (1376-1446), the leading schoolmaster of his era, Juan Luis Vives, Martin Luther, and later Jean Baptiste de la Salle, John Locke, and many other teachers, theoreticians, governmental spokesmen, and religious officials proposed specific plans for the education of the disadvantaged.³ One long-range result of their efforts and concern was the gradual establishment in the Western world, about a century ago, of free, compulsory education for all.

If a concern for educating the socially and culturally disadvantaged is not

¹A. Harry Passow, ed. *Deprivation and Disadvantage: Nature and Manifestations*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education, 1970. p. 16. Typical of these social or cultural factors are race, social class, ethnic origin, poverty, sex, and geographic location. In this study the terms "handicapped," "disadvantaged," and "deprived" will often be used interchangeably.

²Jean-Michel Chapoulie and Dominique Merllie. "Les Classes Sociales et l'Ecole," *Cahiers Pédagogiques*, No. 102. January 1972, pp. 41-48.

³William W. Brickman. "Education of the Poor From Ancient Times to 1800 in International Perspective," *Education and the Many Faces of the Disadvantaged: Cultural and Historical Perspectives* (William W. Brickman and Stanley Lehrer, eds.). New York: John Wiley, 1972.

without historical roots, neither is it limited to American shores.⁴ Even in Great Britain, where educators have received just praise for their efforts with the very young, research has shown that by the age of 7 working-class youngsters have dropped far behind their middle-class contemporaries in reading, school work, and general mental development.⁵ The opposition Labor Party has made much of this finding and has proposed what it considers a viable solution to educational inequality in a highly controversial "Green Paper" on education.⁶

The problem of providing education for socially and culturally deprived children that will give them the reasonable expectation of attaining the same academic, social, and economic rewards as other children has, in fact, taken on such worldwide proportions that the International Bureau of Education (IBE) made it the theme of its International Conference on Education, 33d session, held in Geneva in September 1971.⁷ Various educational programs of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are also actively studying this problem, as is the Council For Cultural Cooperation of the Council of Europe.⁸ Moreover, the equalization of educational opportunity has been one of the principal goals of the general reforms of national education systems that have been taking place in Western Europe over the past two decades.

This report on some efforts being made in France to improve the education of the socially and culturally disadvantaged is presented for such value as it may have to American educational planners in their search for solutions to this difficult problem.

⁴Several studies on the effect of social disparities on academic achievement have been made in recent years. A convenient résumé of the principal findings of some recent studies in several European countries is available in: Asa Sohlman, *Differences in School Achievement and Occupational Opportunities: Explanatory Factors*, Conference on Policies for Educational Growth, Background Study No. 10, Paris: OECD, 1970. The evidence suggests that in France as well as in the other countries studied (Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and West Germany), the children of middle and upper income families consistently outperformed in school work the children of families from the lower economic and social levels of society. See also: Torsten Husen, *Social Background and Educational Career*, Paris: CERI/OECD, 1972.

⁵Ronald Davie, Neville Butler, and Harvey Goldstein, *From Birth to Seven*, London: Longmans, 1972. "The average gap in reading attainment between the children from unskilled families and those from professional families was well over two years at the age of seven. The gap between the least advantaged (with an unskilled father and overcrowded [home] with poor amenities) and the most advantaged children was on average over four years. . . Even by the age of seven, then, serious and important inequalities have been established." *The New York Times*, June 6, 1972, p. 2.

⁶Mr. Edward Short, Shadow Minister of Education in Great Britain, stated that his party's proposal "represented a move away from the principle of equality in favor of positive discrimination in allocating money, teachers, buildings, and equipment to help those disadvantaged for social, economic, environmental, sex, or physical reasons." *The Times Educational Supplement*, No. 2982, July 14, 1972, pp. 10 and 12.

⁷*Final Report, International Conference on Education*, 33d Session, Sept. 15-23, 1971. Geneva: UNESCO/IBE, 1971.

⁸*Equal Educational Opportunity*, Center for Educational Research and Innovation. Paris: OECD, n.d. See the other OECD publications listed among the Selected References. It is significant that *Social Indicators: Areas of Policy Concern in Education* is at present being written by various OECD specialists and committees.

2. Changing Social Realities in Contemporary France

Traditionally, the French educational system has been characterized by rigorous examinations that, in theory, serve to place higher education and prestigious governmental and commercial positions on a competitive and democratic basis. In fact, the competition for these positions has been, for the most part, among the sons and daughters of the middle and upper classes. It seems that the children of the poor, more often than not, do not receive the appropriate career guidance or academic orientation to prepare them for the qualifying examinations. Consequently, there is the paradox of competitive examinations, originally intended to be democratic "equalizers," actually frustrating the rising social expectations of previously passive segments of the population.

A Government-appointed "Commission des Sages," chaired by Louis Joxe, recently offered some numerical comparisons to illustrate one aspect of the changing face of French secondary education, which in the past has been the highly selective avenue to the university and social status. In 1910, the Joxe Commission reported, there were in all French secondary education only 10,500 teachers. In 1959 there were 67,500, and in 1972 a startling 235,000. Likewise, there were in 1897 only 127,000 secondary school pupils. This number increased to 1,375,000 in 1958, and soared to 3,718,000 during academic year 1971-72.¹

More significant, perhaps, than the tremendous increase in numbers are the fundamental changes of attitude toward education on the part of many students and teachers. Until recently, according to the Joxe Commission, the teacher was considered part of an academic "priesthood" that transmitted to students a "culture" which they accepted without challenge as important to their personal development and careers. This is no longer generally accepted, and a malaise has set in which the Joxe Commission believes is symptomatic of a profound "mutation" in the fundamental concept of education that will force teachers and administrators to rethink their most comfortably held notions about education. This rethinking will lead in the long run, the Commission believes, to completely new forms of teaching, educational administration, and student-teacher relationships.

¹ "Le Rapport de la Commission des Sages," *Le Monde*, June 27, 1972, p. 11. Mr. Louis Joxe is now a member of the Conseil Supérieur des Français de l'Etranger and of the Assemblée Nationale.

3. Some Educational Disadvantages

For reasons that to an American observer are disturbingly familiar,¹ French educational planners have been sensitive for some time to the need for change in their educational system. From the earliest grades on, for example, there is a measurable difference in academic achievement between the disadvantaged and other children. And this persists despite a highly developed system of early childhood education that scrupulously provides the same inschool opportunities and attention to all pupils.¹

In France as in the United States, written and oral communication is often a serious problem for culturally disadvantaged children and is an important cause of low academic achievement. A science teacher in Briançon said that he was convinced that the standard French he spoke was, in effect, a foreign language to many of his students.² Because of peer group pressure and fear of appearing to be "sissy" or "putting on airs," many school children consistently refused to use any speech patterns but the accepted regional *patois* or neighborhood slang. Had these children been truly bilingual, in that they could understand and speak both standard French and their preferred dialect, the pedagogical problems would not have been so severe. As it is, however, many children find it difficult, if not impossible, to understand their teachers and to use textbooks and other teaching aids. With their powers of understanding thus impaired by fundamental language comprehension problems, it is not surprising that disadvantaged children show little aptitude for abstract thought and little interest in conventional schooling.

Another cause of low academic achievement among disadvantaged children is lack of parental support, a sense that parents do not consider academic achievement important. There seems to be on the part of many poor families a greater interest in material goods than in culture, education, or aesthetic experiences.³ Automobiles, television sets, and clothing take on a centrality that

¹In July 1970 and again in July 1971, the Fédération des Cercles de Recherche et d'Action Pédagogiques, an independent educational organization, sponsored seminars on the education of the social and culturally handicapped. The results of these meetings and of a questionnaire soliciting the views of classroom teachers on this problem were published in *Cahiers Pédagogiques*, No. 102, January 1972.

²R. Lestournelle, cited in *Cahiers Pédagogiques*, No. 102, January 1972, p. 29.

³Marie-Elizabeth Delouvrier, cited in *Cahiers Pédagogiques*, No. 102, p. 24. Poverty does not seem in itself to explain fully the attitudes toward culture and learning of the disadvantaged. In this regard, the International Educational Achievement Project's International Mathematics Study points out that children from the lowest social group tested in Belgium appear to outperform Swedish and French children from the highest social group. (Törsten Husén. op. cit.) The reasons for this are not known, but the fact may suggest that differences in national school systems have some educational significance. (*Early Childhood Education*. Paris: OECD/CERI, 1972.)

they often do not have in more affluent households. For a child in such a social context to be able to see beyond the immediate pleasure of material satisfaction to the long-range intellectual and social rewards of serious study is difficult, unless he receives strong support from his family. In France, as in the United States, experience shows that such support is not very common in deprived situations.

In regard to parental attitudes, the French Government stated in reply to a UNESCO/IBE questionnaire on the social background of students and their chance of success at school:

These efforts [to make secondary education more generally available] will always fall short of the mark so long as the largest section of the population (industrial workers, farmers, clerical staff) continues to oppose extension of the period of school attendance and to question its usefulness.⁴

It is precisely this absence of significant cultural reinforcement from parents and family that is central to the academic problems of culturally disadvantaged children. Indeed, studies made by the Centre de Sociologie Européenne indicate that the level of the head of the family's highest academic diploma is more statistically significant to academic achievement on the part of the children of the household than is his annual income.⁵ Parents of a certain cultural and academic background seem to transmit to their children in some informal way a set of attitudes toward learning and a familiarity with academic and cultural resources that contribute significantly to their success in school.⁶ Thus, no child begins his first day of school with his mind a Lockean *tabula rasa*. Rather, he has been to a greater or lesser degree already "programed" to be responsive or nonresponsive to academic stimuli. In this respect, it is possible that large numbers of students whom teachers commonly call "gifted" are not endowed with any more "brain power" than other children, but rather are products of a richer cultural environment and, consequently, have been better prepared for school.

The absence of motivation and of interest in schoolwork characteristic of socially and culturally handicapped children is described by Michèle Accart, a middle school teacher. She stated that after hearing continued objections such as "Why study that?", "That's not interesting!", and "It's boring!", her experiences in a working-class school made her question seriously the axiom that all children have a natural desire to learn that a well-trained teacher can tap and develop.

... For my part, I do not believe in the existence of a thirst for knowledge on the part of the lower classes as described, for example, by certain radical

⁴ *The Social Background of Students and Their Chance of Success at School*. International Conference on Education, Working Document, ED/BIE/Confinted 33/3. Paris: UNESCO/IBE, 1971. p. 35.

⁵ Jean-Michel Chapoulie and Dominique Merllie. "Les Classes Sociales et l'Ecole," *Cahiers Pédagogiques*, No. 102, January 1972, p. 47.

⁶ The father's occupational level is of considerable importance since it is related to income and to the worth of the father's labor in his own eyes and in those of the community. This index is often spoken of as the "socioeconomic status of the child." Even though it does not depend on the child's initiative, it gives a value to the immediate context of his day to day life. (*The Social Background of Students and Their Chance of Success at School*, loc. cit.)

leftists in the lycées. Rather, there seems to be a deadening indifference (which is explained obviously by the social conditions in which they live ...) and this lack of interest is passed on to the children. ...⁷

Several empirical studies on the academic achievement and attitudes toward school of the socially and culturally deprived seem to bear out Mlle. Accart's observation.⁸

It becomes clear, therefore, that raising the level of academic achievement of the socially and culturally handicapped is not solely an educational problem. Even schools which take great pride in providing the same opportunities for all on a scrupulously democratic basis, such as those of the French system, have great difficulty in providing the disadvantaged with an equal chance for achievement, considering the handicap with which some children enter school. The French sociologist Bourdieu wrote of this problem:

If we really take soundly-conditioned inequalities, scholastic or cultural, seriously, we cannot but conclude that the *formal* equitableness observed throughout the whole educational system is actually inequitable, and in any society which professes democratic ideals, its effect is to safeguard privileges rather than to extend them more widely. In effect, for a school to favour the favoured and disavour the deprived, the content of the instruction provided, the methods and techniques for imparting it, and the criteria for assessment merely need to disregard the cultural inequalities between the children of different social classes. In other words, by treating all pupils, however unequal in fact, as equal in rights and duties, the school system in practice ends by confirming the initial cultural inequalities.⁹

The problem, as defined here, obviously requires a solution far broader than a restructuring of educational systems. It raises fundamental questions about a nation's self-image, its goals, its concept of the nature and destiny of man in society, and its responsibility toward its citizens. The working paper for the UNESCO/IBE Conference on the Social Background of Students and their Chance of Success at School underscored this point, which has long been made by comparative educators:

In the last analysis, the problem is a political one. Education, in general, including its institutional characteristics, is determined by the socioeconomic structure of the country: schools reflect the society in which they are founded. For the society, as for its schools, the setting of goals and the pattern of development are matters of political decision. Hence, national policies as a whole, and not simply educational policies, form the broadest context of existing inequalities.¹⁰

⁷Ibid. p. 30.

⁸See: Jean-Michel Chapoulie and Dominique Merllie, op. cit. pp. 41-48; Charles Nam, Monique Solliliage, Randolph Quenum, and Asa Sohlman. *Group Disparities in Educational Participation*. Background Study No. 4, Conference on Policies for Educational Growth, Paris: OECD, 1970; *Education and Distribution of Income*. Proceedings of the Conference on Policies for Educational Growth. Paris: OECD, 1970; and Asa Sohlman. *Differences in School Achievement and Occupational Opportunities: Explanatory Factors*. Conference on Policies for Educational Growth, Background Study No. 10. Paris: OECD, 1970.

⁹*The Social Background of Students and Their Chance of Success at School*. loc. cit. p. 8.

¹⁰Ibid. p. 15.

In his preface to the OECD/CERI publication, *Equal Educational Opportunity*, J. R. Gass, Director of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, takes the same position.¹¹

Thus, many educators believe that any attempt to remedy the educational inequalities existing in modern society without at the same time attempting to remedy the political, sociological, and economic factors that contribute to them can provide, at best, a partial solution. Yet, even limited and one-dimensional governmental action to foster equality of opportunity is considered by many as better than no action at all. "The school cannot on its own change the world or the quality of life," said the Association Française des Professeurs de Français. "Our efforts for human freedom, integrity, and sound development cannot be separated from the economic, social, and political context in which they function. Nonetheless, the school can, despite this, be of considerable immediate assistance to children and, at the same time, help them develop long range sensibilities to the needs of their society."¹²

The CERI report on equal opportunity in education stated that most strategies aimed at equalizing educational opportunities have been inspired mainly by what it calls the "educational theory." This theory, in contrast to others that emphasize family and cultural or socioeconomic factors, "puts more emphasis on the school and teacher variables and could be called the optimistic theory because it believes that the influence of the school could be increased in relation to that of the non-school factors on which the other two theories concentrate."¹³

A recent work, militantly Marxist, is much less optimistic. In *L'Ecole Capitaliste en France*, Baudelot and Estabiet interpret every aspect of school activity in terms of the struggle between the classes. The children of the poor have scholastic difficulties not because of possible cultural and social deprivation but because of ideological repression. Efforts at "democratizing education" will be effective, they say, only if the ideological orientation of the schools is changed radically from its support of "bourgeois cultural values" to the cause of the dictatorship of the proletariat.¹⁴ Such a position indicates the wide scope of political-pedagogical theory on the question of the education of the socially and culturally handicapped.

The present study will leave to specialists in political science, economics, and sociology the analysis of the fundamental causes of these very important social dynamics. It will, for its part, concentrate on the pedagogical approaches to the problem of the education of socially and culturally disadvantaged children now being attempted by the French Ministry of National Education.

¹¹ *Equal Educational Opportunity*. Center for Educational Research and Innovation. Paris: OECD/CERI, n.d. p. 7. One might note in passing that these strong positions taken by a variety of international organizations cast some doubt on the validity of some demands for teacher accountability based solely on their pupils' achievement test scores. It is clear that certain sociocultural factors, over which the best of teachers can have little or no control, can be in many instances determining factors on pupil achievement. Any professionally sound evaluation of teacher performance will have to take these factors into account.

¹² *Cahiers Pédagogiques*, No. 102, p. 11.

¹³ *Equal Educational Opportunity*, loc. cit. p. 19. For a recent presentation of this point of view, see: Christopher Jencks et al. *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America*. Basic Books, 1972. Jencks' thought is summarized in "The Schools and Equal Opportunity," *Saturday Review*, October 1972, pp. 37-42. *The New York Times* editorialized on his conclusions on Sept. 10, 1972.

¹⁴ Christian Baudelot and Roger Estabiet. *L'Ecole Capitaliste en France*. Paris: Maspéro, 1971.

4. Recent Educational Initiatives

Governing Principles

For more than a decade and especially since May 1968, French educational planners have been attempting to come to grips with changing demographic patterns and social attitudes toward education.¹ The principles that have guided their activity were outlined recently by former Minister of National Education Olivier Guichard.² Education in France, he said, must first of all have a substantive content; that is to say, it must teach something. Educational theories that are totally nondirective and which attempt only to stimulate the students' creativity are unacceptable. Secondly, Guichard said that the fact had to be faced that French public education is now non-elitist, mass education, and that this kind of education requires methodologies and approaches different from those used in the past. The third principle, like the second, indicates a growing awareness of the needs of the socially and culturally handicapped: education must be structured in such a way that it can adapt to the real needs of pupils on each level of their education. (Traditionally, the pupil has had to meet criteria anonymously predetermined by bureaucratic decision.)³

Guichard spoke to this point without equivocation:

... Those who deny the necessity of an educational program that is capable of adaptation deny the reality of the situation. More than 65% of all French children enter nursery school at the age of three. For nine consecutive years the children follow the same course of studies. Yet, upon their entrance into the sixth grade, there are substantial differences in their achievement levels. This is a fact that must be faced.⁴

The image of school children throughout France doing the same exercise on the same page of the same textbook at the same time is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. The emphasis has changed, so that school authorities, instead of placing pressure on pupils to meet predetermined norms, feel responsible for recognizing, respecting, and responding in a positive way to the differences between children.

In an effort to apply these newly stated principles, the Commission des Sages made several practical suggestions in its June 1972 report. It recommended that

¹ *Reviews of National Policies for Education: France*. Paris: OECD, 1971. pp. 29-33.

² On July 6, 1972, Guichard was named Minister of Equipment, Housing and Regional Development, and Tourism. He was succeeded as Minister of National Education by Joseph Fontanet.

³ *Le Figaro*. May 3, 1972.

⁴ *Ibid.*

schools have no more than 700 to 800 pupils and that this number be farther divided into "educational units" of 100 pupils. Furthermore, schools should be allowed local autonomy to pursue in their own way the pedagogical goals set by the Ministry of Education. These goals are not to be established in a social vacuum and are to be of two kinds, responding respectively to priorities more or less national in scope and to vocational, economic, and social concerns on the local level.

According to the Commission's suggestions, local school authorities would be responsible for organizing the academic schedule and choosing the methodological approaches best suited to their stated priorities. The Ministry of National Education would require only that a given number of hours per year be devoted to each subject. In fact, 10 percent of the total hours of instruction would be left unassigned by Paris, and the local principal would be free to use this time according to his pupils' needs. Similarly, block budgetary grants would be made to individual schools according to criteria mutually agreed upon by national and local authorities. The school principal in consultation with his "Council of Administration" would determine how the money would be used.

The Commission recommended also that schools be provided with appropriate teaching aids and learning centers where pupils could study on their own. A team approach to teaching and pupil guidance was encouraged, and teaching auxiliaries were suggested to relieve teachers of routine tasks and free them for class preparation and more personal contact with their students.

Of particular significance is the Commission's recommendation that new ways be found to evaluate academic achievement on every level, including the baccalaureate. "The quality of the baccalaureate" said Guichard, "depends on the quality of the students who take it, not the inverse."⁵ It has been suggested that a significant first step in this direction would be for individual secondary schools to be allowed to elaborate their own baccalaureate-level examinations. These would be flexible enough to adapt to the nature of each student's academic program. Granting of baccalaureate status by evaluation of a student's academic profile, based on several years' academic achievement or on knowledge and ability demonstrated in projects, etc., is also under consideration. Guichard said that reforms such as these may be implemented in 3 or 4 years.⁶ Flexible and nontraditional measures of achievement are especially important to culturally and socially disadvantaged children since they help to equalize the verbalization handicap these children have vis-a-vis their middle and upper class schoolmates.

The Commission des Sages also made several recommendations for changes in teacher preparation. Of particular relevance to this study is its suggestion that, in addition to their specialized subject matter knowledge, teachers study human and child development and the principal currents of thought on contemporary social problems. Moreover it suggested that teachers be required to have the physical and psychological traits necessary to understand and communicate with young people. The report suggested, furthermore (as did the James Report in England), that teacher education be an ongoing process, and that educators be "recycled" periodically in an effort to raise their consciousness and sensitivity to changing social conditions and changing young people.⁷

⁵ Olivier Guichard, "Preparer l'Avenir," *l'éducation*, No. 140, May 18, 1972, p. IV.

⁶ *Le Figaro*, May 3, 1972. Reprinted as: "Trois Idées Forces pour une Pédagogie," *l'éducation*, No. 141, May 25, 1972, pp. I-II.

⁷ *Le Monde*, June 27, 1972, p. 12.

Structural Changes

Deliberate and important steps have been taken over the past decade to combat the effects of social and cultural poverty on French schoolchildren. Preprimary education is a case in point. The number of nursery and maternal schools, by no means a recent phenomenon in France, has doubled over the past 10 years. (A U.S. Bureau of Education Comparative Education Study, made in 1882, traced them to 1771.)⁸ Thus school authorities have been able to accommodate virtually all 5- to 6-year-olds in a preschool program. (Compulsory schooling begins at age 6.) Eighty-six percent of the 4- to 5-year-olds are also enrolled, as well as 61 percent of the 3- to 4-year-olds and 18 percent of all 2- to 3-year-olds.⁹ The Government intends to make even more places available, especially in rural areas.¹⁰

The UNESCO/IBE International Conference on Education underscored the importance of such efforts:

It is, therefore, important to provide or to develop pre-primary education and to make it accessible to all children, both in country areas and in cities, especially in association with development programmes. Thus, all children would be enabled to make an equal start in their studies.¹¹

Experience indicates that it is, perhaps, overly optimistic to suggest that programs of preschool education will, of themselves, equalize the differences caused by cultural and social handicaps, but they are unquestionably a positive first step that has received widespread popular support.

In this respect, French officials recognize that not only do these preprimary schools contribute to the goal of equal educational opportunity, they also

⁸ *Maternal Schools in France*. Circulars of Information of the Bureau of Education, No. 5-1882. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1882. The letter of transmittal from John Eaton, Commissioner of Education, to H. M. Teller, Secretary of the Interior, that accompanied this study is not without relevance to our topic and our times:

Sir:

The legal age in most of our public school systems begins at the sixth year; in all our cities a very large share of child life below that age is outside of school influences and often destitute of the training that orderly family life bestows. This condition is a dangerous one for the exposed children and ultimately for the communities in which they live, and educators and philanthropists are thinking much about what should be done.

The same question in France has been considered with great seriousness, and some important results of this study will be found in the accompanying paper on maternal schools, which I have the honor to recommend for publication as a circular of information.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

John Eaton, Commissioner
Washington, D.C., Dec. 4, 1882.

⁹ "The New Term 1971-72 in Schools and Universities," *French News*, Vol. 6. Bulletin des Services Culturels et Scientifiques de l'Ambassade de France. 1972. p. 24.

¹⁰ Oliver Guichard. "L'Enseignement en Zone Rurale," *l'Education*, No. 144, June 15, 1972, p. III.

¹¹ *Final Report. International Conference on Education, 33d Session. Sept. 15-23, 1971. Geneva: UNESCO/IBE, 1971. p. 27.*

respond to the desire of many women for greater opportunity to contribute to society outside the home through work, study, and constructive use of personal freedom.¹² Government-supervised nursery and maternal schools give many mothers the respite from child care necessary to pursue their professional interests.¹³

In contrast to this extensive and relatively flexible system of preschool education, French primary education remains somewhat rigid. At present, efforts to renew and reform it center on the methodology of the *tiers temps*. This term is used to describe the division of the school day into three parts, officially equal in status and importance, for (1) the basic study of language and mathematics, (2) the study of socially oriented subjects, and (3) personal involvement in physical and artistic education. Traditionally, of course, emphasis in elementary school has been heavily oriented to content.

In the lower secondary school, emphasis is on guidance and counseling (*l'orientation*) by teams of teachers, parents, and school psychologists. Curriculum is kept as nonspecialized as possible to allow pupils to postpone career choices and to change from one track to another. Comprehensive lower secondary institutions (*Collèges d'Enseignement Secondaire*), which offer various academic programs under the same roof, facilitate the pupils' freedom to switch from one program to another as their interests and abilities develop.¹⁴ In the near future, all pupils of grades 6 to 9 will attend a comprehensive school.

On the upper secondary level (*l'enseignement secondaire long*) the *baccalauréat* program has been diversified into five main tracks with several subspecialties in each. There is a tendency to broaden the "core instruction" common at all tracks so that students may more easily switch from one track to another. Moreover, there is an acknowledged need for curriculum reform that would help establish more obvious ties between school and "real life." Governing councils (*conseils d'administration*), consisting of representatives of the administration, teachers, students, parents, and the community are being elected in secondary schools in a further attempt to democratize and decentralize. These councils have been given considerable authority on the local level. Finally, more and more students in the upper classes of secondary school are being encouraged to choose technical courses, particularly those leading to careers in industry.¹⁵

During the primary-secondary school sequence, medical examinations are given to all children at regular intervals. Should a physical or social maladjustment be discovered, detailed instructions from the Ministry of Health

¹² *Early Childhood Education*. Paris: OECD/CERI, 1972. p. 4.

¹³ "The *écoles maternelles* are organized and financed by the State. Their existence is not obligatory but may be requested by the town. The creation of a school once decided, the town is committed to assume during ten years the expenses and upkeep of the school. The State has the charge of the salary of the teachers. Apart from these nursery schools which are municipal and free, private nursery schools may be opened by philanthropic organizations, industrial firms, or individuals. They are then called *Jardins d'enfants*. Their organization and their financing is in the charge of the people who found them. But the State still exercises control over health through inspections similar to those exercised in public schools." "Preschool Education in France," *Education in France*, No. 41, n.d. p. 1.

¹⁴ For an introductory study of the CES, see: "Le Collège d'Enseignement Secondaire," *l'Education*, No. 131. Mar. 2, 1972, pp. II-VI.

¹⁵ *The Social Background of Students and Their Chance of Success at School*. International Conference on Education, Working Document, ED/IBE/Confinted 33/3. Paris: UNESCO/IBE, 1971.

are to be followed to assure that specialized treatment is made available.¹⁶ This requirement is part of an overall program of professional guidance and orientation designed to monitor a pupil's physical and social development and to identify his academic interests and career orientation. Particular emphasis is placed upon proper academic guidance for pupils at the beginning of grade 6, the end of grades 7 and 9, and all during grade 10. At these points important academic options are open to pupils. Care is taken, however, that no academic track lead to a dead end. Moreover, it is planned that school programs interrupted prematurely may be resumed later in life with no serious academic penalties.

A concerted legislative and administrative effort is also being made to upgrade the quality, prestige, and availability of technical and vocational education. Each student now has *the right* under law to education that will prepare him for a job.¹⁷ According to their talents and inclinations, students of all ages may work for various state-controlled industrial or commercial diplomas which range in level from the vocational certificate issued at the end of compulsory schooling to the diplomas of the *Institute Universitaires Techniques* (IUT's), which are received after 2 years of university study.

Fundamental changes have been made also on the higher education level, mostly as a result of the Reform Act of November 1968. Many of the changes—which in general were toward decentralization, democratization, and the multidisciplinary approach—favor access to higher education by groups that in the past were excluded. For example, the University of Vincennes (Paris VIII) has been set up as an experimental university where the requirement for entrance is not the baccalaureate but work experience.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 40. Special Medico-Psycho-Pedagogical Centers have been established to treat children with school maladjustments that are not physical in nature.

¹⁷ See the present writer's study: *A French Approach to Career Education*. U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973. In contrast to the "do or die" examinations of the past, professional qualifications may now be earned on a credit basis over a period of years.

5. Long-Range Cultural Approaches

However great the commitment of school officials to a true democratization of education and however significant the structural reforms that make it possible administratively, the equalization of educational opportunity requires in addition that socially and culturally disadvantaged groups be helped to appreciate the possibilities that education offers for their personal and professional growth. Officials are attempting to do this by making career, vocational, and educational guidance more available to the general public and by important but long-range efforts to widen the field of sociocultural activity for all.

Of utmost importance in this regard are programs of adult education, called *l'éducation permanente et continue*. Such programs, which can be organized either as leisure-time or on-the-job activities, can provide out-of-school citizens having a limited cultural background with a chance to "catch up" by improving their professional qualifications and by creating in their households an atmosphere of respect for learning that will be a subtle but important factor in determining their children's attitude toward school and study. In providing a "second chance" to adults and by enriching the cultural environment of their children, programs of adult education play an indispensable role in educating the socially and culturally disadvantaged. Former Premier Jacques Chaban-Delmas considered them as necessary to the well-being of modern French society as compulsory education of the young.¹

In their report to the International Bureau of Education, French officials referred to another strategy to raise the cultural level of disadvantaged groups of citizens. "The establishment of a cultural action fund in the near future should make it possible to encourage innovation and experimentation and to organize cultural activities in various sectors under the aegis of the different state departments."² Practical steps in this direction have included establishing well-equipped neighborhood *centres socio-culturels* which provide space for pupils to work alone or in small groups during school hours and a cultural resource for the community after hours.³

¹ Jacques Chaban-Delmas. "La Réforme des Enseignements Techniques de l'Apprentissage et de la Formation Professionnelle Permanente," *l'éducation*, No. 107, June 10, 1971, pp. II-III. See also: "La Formation Continue dans le Cadre de l'Education Nationale," *l'éducation*, No. 127, Feb. 3, 1972, pp. II-III.

² *The Social Background of Students and Their Chance of Success at School*. International Conference on Education, Working Document. ED/BIE/Confinted 33/3. Paris: UNESCO/IBE, 1971, p. 43.

³ "Des Centres Socio-Culturels s'installent dans des Etablissements Scolaires," *l'éducation*, No. 104, May 20, 1971, pp. II-III.

Several new initiatives are still on an experimental basis. Among these are special programs for women who wish to reenter the professional world, foreign laborers in France, teachers in working class ghettos, unskilled workers, and professionals engaged in career guidance.⁴ It is possible also that the resources of the National Center for Tele-Education (Centre Nationale de Télé-enseignement -CNTE) will soon be used to provide courses for those who for one reason or another cannot leave their homes.

Officials are also attempting to improve the reading habits of the general public.⁵ As part of this campaign the Ministry of Education has given strong support to expanding of public library services. It has also decided to encourage French families to begin home libraries by presenting newly wed couples with a set of six French classics on their wedding day.⁶

To meet the specialized language and cultural needs of the 700,000 children of immigrant workers being integrated into its schools, the Government has organized through its Research and Study Center for the Diffusion of French (CREDIF) 250 beginners' classes, usually of 1 year's duration, in which newly arrived foreign children, aged 7 to 16, learn to read and speak French before being transferred to their appropriate grade level in the public schools. In the near future, CREDIF hopes to offer these "language and culture" classes for immigrant children at age 2. There are proposals also to provide Saturday classes for parents of these immigrant children and to have most general instruction given by teachers specially trained in the history and geography of the countries of the children's origin (especially Algeria, Italy, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia, and Yugoslavia). The stated aim of these proposals is "to give these children the possibility of receiving an education in a new country without taking them too far from the culture of their homeland, and without creating too much of a dichotomy between the two civilizations."⁷

It would be convenient if, in conclusion, one could provide an administrative model, or a methodology, or a new law that, once implemented, could be relied upon to solve the problem of educating the socially and culturally handicapped. No such model, methodology, or law has yet been discovered or developed. The problem is obviously complex and no single solution is apparent or likely.

Progress is being made, however, though some of the most significant is by the *via negativa*. Few present day officials, for example, claim that education alone, properly funded, can lead to the perfecting of man and society. Rather, more and more educators are now prepared to admit that schools cannot provide an answer to many serious social and cultural problems. There have come upon the scene not only a new math and a new social studies, but also a new humility before the mystery and the promise of learning. Mass education is seen less as a new religion able to bestow social salvation than as one of the amenities of a civilized society to which all citizens have a right.

Educators have come to realize also that if the schools are to show concern for the dignity of the human being and the quality of his life, and if they are to provide true equality of academic opportunity, then society as a whole and

⁴"Formation Continue: Actions Experimentales," *l'éducation*, No. 129. Feb. 17, 1972, pp. III-V.

⁵"La Politique de la Lecture Publique," *l'éducation*, No. 100. Apr. 22, 1971, pp. I-II.

⁶"Operation: Un Livret de Famille et Six Livres," *l'éducation*, No. 139. May 11, 1972, p. IV.

⁷"Immigrant Children School-Integrated", *France Actuelle*. October 1972, XXI:17:8.

governments, in particular, must demonstrate these values in their processes and in the respect and concern they have for all their citizens. As usual, this is easier to say than to do, even for advanced and enlightened societies.

Fortunately the problem—truly now an international one—is being studied in international perspective. The International Conference on Education, meeting in Geneva in September 1971, made thoughtful recommendations that can be implemented by most governments in whole or in part. Also, the concept of recurrent education, which is gaining increasing acceptance in so many countries, offers a fresh approach to both compensatory and higher education by proposing a variety of approaches to upper secondary vocational and higher education.⁸

It should be borne in mind, finally, that any attempt to restructure French education to meet the needs of the culturally and socially handicapped represents a particularly delicate problem. Education in France as it has existed through the years, with its ideal of selectivity and *culture générale*, has produced an intellectual elite with a tradition of academic excellence that is widely recognized.⁹ As a result, efforts at educational renewal and any structured concern for the needs of the socially and culturally handicapped have had to represent a careful and delicate synthesis of tradition and innovation. It is to the credit of French educational planners and legislators that in little more than a decade they have been able to accomplish so much in their efforts to diversify, democratize, and individualize the educational system.

⁸ *Equal Educational Opportunity*. Center for Education Research and Innovation. Paris: OECD/CERI, n.d. See also: Ake Dalin. *Recurrent Education in Norway*. Paris: OECD/CERI, 1972; Jarl Bengtsson. *The Swedish View of Recurrent Education*. Paris: OECD/CERI, 1972; Peter F. Regan, Norman Solkoff, and Walter F. Stafford. *Recurrent Education in the State of New York*. Paris: OECD/CERI, 1972; Herbert E. Striner. *Continuing Education as a National Capital Investment*. Kalamazoo, Mich.: W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1972; and Raymond E. Wanner. *A French Approach to Career Education*. U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973.

⁹ *Reviews of National Policies For Education: France*. Paris: OECD, 1971. p. 26.

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